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Realizing the true potential of recycling in a circular economy with nexus thinking

The demand for resources or what we take from nature is on the rise for many reasons and so does the waste generation. Recycling is certainly a sustainable way to conserve resources. However, recycling itself is not able to address the increasing resource demand and waste generation issues. This requires a holistic approach that entails the whole process of consumption. The process of consumption as we traditionally know of is based on a linear economic concept of take-make-use-trash. We take natural resources to make products for our use. Whatever is left after make/use is what we trash as waste. Circular economy presents us the most sustainable alternative to linear economy that we practice today. What circular economy teaches us is minimizing both take and trash by using the material, that we have already borrowed from nature, as many times as possible. This means that the make/use steps should ideally go in a circular pattern which is also why the process is called circular economy. One may wonder why circular economy is yet to become popular despite the sound argument it offers. It is just not so easy to walk away from the linear economy concept that we have been using for thousands of years. Transitioning to a circular economy requires us to train ourselves to think and act differently. This study focusses on how we may benefit from nexus thinking of integrated resources management as a catalyzer to transition to a circular economy to realize the true potential of recycling.

Biography

Hiroshan Hettiarachchi is currently working as a Civil Engineering Professor and is also the Head of Unit-Waste Management at the United Nations University (UNU-FLORES) which is an integral part of the United Nations system. He has previously served at Lawrence Technological University in Michigan, USA, as the Director of Civil Engineering Graduate programs from 2010 to 2013. His work covers multiple topics including, sustainability, circular economy, environmental resources management, waste management, geotechnical and geoenvironmental engineering.

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